

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN  
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING  
ON NASA MANAGEMENT  
MARCH 22, 2000

- C First, let me thank Senator Frist for holding this hearing today and for his continual leadership of this Subcommittee.
- C Over the past year, I have continually been amazed by the reports coming out of NASA about the mission failures and program delays. I am glad the Committee is examining these issues today. I understand that four of the reports on these incidents will be discussed while other reports will be released later this month.
- C The extent of mismanagment noted in these reports is very startling. For years now, I have expressed concern regarding NASA's management and I repeat that concern at this time.
- C I am pleased to see GAO is testifying along with the other witnesses. It is my understanding that GAO will offer preliminary findings regarding Shuttle workforce and safety issues and I applaud them for doing so.
- C In review of the various reports presented today, some of the overarching themes are apparent: staff complacency, inadequately trained personnel, lack of effective internal communication, and staff not following established procedures.
- C The funding impact of failures and delays is staggering, estimated to be in the billions of dollars. Some costs we can't even calculate. But, we do know that:
- the International Space Station cost increases amount to \$9 billion;
  - the two failed Mars missions cost \$360 million; and
  - X-33, the experimental reusable launch vehicle, the future of which is uncertain, has a cost to date of approximately \$1 billion.

- C We know it will take some time for NASA to digest all of the recommendations that will be made here. As such, the Committee looks forward to a formal response from NASA very soon.
- C On a specific matter, yesterday, a press article reported that NASA knew of a fatal design flaw in the Mars Polar Lander even before its arrival at Mars, but that NASA withheld this information from the public. The article goes on to say that the future Young report on the Mars Polar Lander will be “devastating” to NASA. I have requested a copy of this report from NASA, but NASA has indicated the report cannot be released until cleared by the White House.
- C It has been brought to my attention that NASA, earlier today, “categorically” denied this report.
- C I had originally hoped that the Young report would be a part of today’s discussions, but the report was delayed from its original release date earlier this month.
- C If the media reports are true that NASA withheld critical information from the public and elected officials, then the trust that is vital between this government and its citizens has been violated and warrants a very serious examination of how the agency operates. During today’s hearing I hope Mr. Goldin will specifically address this matter.
- C Senator Frist, again I thank you for your leadership on these issues and look forward to working with you and Senator Breaux in completing the NASA Authorization conference with the House.

## Questions for Mr. Dan Goldin, Administrator, NASA

- 1) You were quoted in yesterday's press article on the Mars Polar Lander report as saying "the Young report will be the Rogers Commission of Space Science" referring to the devastating critique delivered by the panel which examined the 1986 Challenger disaster. Furthermore, Ed Stone, Director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, was quoted as warning workers that "the days ahead may at times be very difficult." Can you explain these statements?
- 2) Last September, Senator McCain and I requested information on the operational costs for the Propulsion Module, which will add additional capability to the Space Station. We still have not received a response. We requested the information not so much to challenge the numbers, but as a litmus test of whether the program is ready to proceed. Assuming your lack of response means the information is not available and given the National Academy of Science's recent finding of a lack of long-term planning on the Station by NASA, the question is: are we ready to proceed with the Propulsion Module?
- 3) The GAO statement today identifies a number of internal reviews on workforce issues for the Shuttle program prior to the report from the Independent Assessment Team led by Dr. McDonald. Can you explain to us if these reports have been acted upon at this time and if not, why not?